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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Iran: Nuclear Program
- [1](#)3. Israel-India Relations

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Key stories in the media:  
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Citing recent comments by President Bush and Acting PM Ehud Olmert, Ha'aretz wrote that it has been mutually agreed that the U.S. will provide a defense umbrella to shield Israel from any Iranian attack. The newspaper noted that the President has raised the U.S. commitment to Israel a notch closer to the defense level it provides for NATO. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying at Sunday's cabinet meeting: "The American President's statement held a very important development -- he said the U.S. would stand by its ally, also militarily, if need be, in view of the Iranian threat."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice phoned Acting PM Ehud Olmert to reassure him that the U.S. would stand firm regarding Hamas, a gesture that the newspaper says is seen as a sign of political support for his decision to transfer 250 million shekels (around USD 53 million) to the PA. The Jerusalem Post cited a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office, according to which Rice called to "reiterate the U.S. position on Hamas." The statement said she emphasized the U.S. was in close contact with the international community to ensure "there was no erosion in the international position in Hamas."

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that Israel will determine its permanent borders within two years, and the Jordan Valley and the settlement blocs would remain in Israel's hands.

Israel Radio reported that during her visit to New York, FM Tzipi Livni will discuss Iran's nuclear program and developments in the PA with the representatives to the UN from the five permanent UN Security Council member countries. The station quoted Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon as saying that the Iranian issue is the gravest problem posed to the free world since World War II.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn is scheduled to go to the Persian Gulf later this week to raise funds for the financially strapped PA, amid some concerns in Western capitals that if the money is not raised, Iran may step in and fund the PA to get a strong foothold in the Gaza Strip.

Major media reported that two high-ranking Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades operatives were killed Monday night after missiles fired from IAF fighter jets in Gaza City struck their car. It was the third targeted killing in Gaza in three days. The Brigades vowed to avenge its

activists' deaths. Israel Radio reported that the IAF struck a bridge and access roads in the northern Gaza Strip. This morning, Israel Radio reported that two IDF soldiers were wounded in Nablus. The station reported that Ahmed Radad, the commander of Islamic Jihad in the city, was killed in the clash. The Jerusalem Post reported that, assuming that violence will prevail after the new Palestinian government is formed, the Israeli defense establishment is examining options for the day after. All media reported that members of a Hebron Hamas cell responsible for the murders of six Israelis in shooting attacks in 2005 were arrested last month by security forces.

All media echoed a revelation made public by Channel 10-TV last night: the station played back remarks made by Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin more than a month ago. Diskin said: "The political echelon can do whatever it wants, but from a security standpoint I am opposed to transferring additional land to the Palestinians." His comments sparked controversy. Diskin was also quoted as saying that Jewish terrorists are a cancer in Israel's body.

Ha'aretz, Maariv, and The Jerusalem Post reported that in the report Peace Now made public on Monday -- a summary of settlements and settler outposts for 2005 -- Peace Now announced on Monday that 12,000 people (according to The Jerusalem Post's report, at least 7,000) joined the existing settlers during 2005, even as 9,000 settlers were removed from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank. The report says that permanent construction is being carried out in 33 of the 103 outposts in the West Bank.

Col. (res.) Danny Tirza and Defense Ministry spokeswoman Rachel Naidek Ashkenazi were quoted as saying in interviews with The Jerusalem Post that by the end of March, the security fence will represent a "continuous obstacle" to terrorists as the segments that roughly follow the Green Line will be nearly finished, even as the total barrier remains about half completed. Israel Radio quoted GOI sources in Jerusalem as warning that the legal problems regarding the completion of the fence in many spots, especially surrounding Jerusalem, must be solved as soon as possible. The sources were quoted as saying that in some areas, notably in the southern West Bank settlements of Tekoa and Nokdim, Jews object to the construction of the fence, saying that they prefer to wait until Israel's official borders are finalized.

Yediot reported that the Defense Ministry has granted two Palestinians who were killed by members of the "New Jewish Underground" the status of "victims of hostile action." Their families will receive hundreds of thousands of shekels in compensation.

The media (Hatzofe's banner) reported that on Monday, Bentzi Lieberman, chair of the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories, complained to Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra that policemen sexually harassed female protesters during the evacuation of the Amona outpost. The media reported on the ongoing request by right-wing circles for an official investigative commission into police behavior at Amona.

Maariv and Israel Radio reported that on Monday, Iran's biggest newspaper, Hamshahri, announced a cartoon contest on the Holocaust, apparently in retaliation to the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten's Muhammad cartoon controversy. Major media reported that the interfaith group Kedem condemned the Israeli media's reprinting of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

Leading media reported that the Labor Party is now focusing its election campaign on Olmert's alleged corruption and that Kadima started a campaign against Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu on Monday. Maariv quoted Meretz-Yahad party chairman Yossi Beilin as saying that Meretz would join Kadima in a government coalition even without the Labor Party. Israel Radio quoted outgoing Shinui party leader Yosef (Tommy) Lapid as saying during a news conference this morning that he would not run for a seat in the next Knesset and that he would support Shinui's splinter party, MK Avraham Poraz's new Secular Zionist Party. Yediot reported that on Monday, former Israeli Consul-General in New York Alon Pinkas joined former national security advisor Uzi Dayan's party Tafnit. Pinkas had won a low spot on the Labor Party's Knesset list.

Ha'aretz reported that on Monday, construction was suspended on the Simon Wiesenthal Center-affiliated Museum of Tolerance being built over a Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem, while the authorities ascertain whether a

ruling Sunday by the court of Islamic law banning construction near the graves is legally binding.

Ha'aretz published the results of Tel Aviv University's Peace Index, conducted January 30-February 1.

- "Is Hamas's victory an existential threat for Israel?" Among Jewish public - Yes: 55 percent; no: 38 percent; 7 percent were undecided.

- "Do you support the creation of a Palestinian state?" Among Jewish public, after Hamas's election victory: Support: 55 percent; object: 40 percent; 5 percent were undecided. Among Jewish public, before Hamas's election victory: Support: 67 percent; object: 27 percent; 6 percent were undecided.

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Ever since Hamas snatched away from him the title of champion of no partners, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority has turned into a distinguished citizen of Jerusalem."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Declarations aside, Israel is acting as if it wishes to save the PA from collapse even if Hamas is the force behind it."

Senior columnist Dan Margalit addressed the disengagement opponents in popular, pluralist Maariv: "What is the difference between the Roadmap ... and Netanyahu's 'iron wall'? The only difference is over quantity.... Don't miss this opportunity."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Presenting the New Darling -- Abu Mazen"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 7): "Ever since Hamas snatched away from him the title of champion of no partners, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority has turned into a distinguished citizen of Jerusalem.... Up until a week ago, Israel only had a stick for its neighbors. They, in turn, hung a Hamas flag on it. Now, it suddenly turns that Israel also knows how to hold out the carrot. If you want Abu Mazen -- you'll eat. If you want Hamas -- you won't eat. Democracy is one thing and cooperation is something else.... 'Democracy on the defensive,' key words in the joint Egyptian-Israeli policy, is very familiar to America ever since September 2001. The defensive posture will be maintained primarily by going on the offensive.... Israel, in coordination with Egypt and the United States, will assault Hamas with a slew of conditions: recognition of the state of Israel's right to exist, of UN Resolution 242, of the Oslo Accords and of course, immediately dropping the armed Intifada. If Hamas accepts even one of these conditions, it will have to change its name to Salaam Now. In the worst case scenario, the debate over these conditions will increase the tension between the extremist circles and the moderates even more and perhaps even lead to a big bang: unification of the Fatah hawks and Hamas doves."

II. "Hamas's Problem"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 7): "[Acting Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert's declared policy of refusing to engage with or support a PA dominated by an unreconstructed Hamas, and urging the world to do the same, is exactly correct. This policy does hold the hope of finally ending international support for an international regime that is deeply implicated in and responsible for terrorism against Israel. It even holds the much slimmer hope of forcing Hamas to renounce its own ideology. But now Olmert is undermining his own declared policy of isolation with his also declared policy of preemptive engagement with and funding of the coming Hamas-dominated regime. How can we expect the international community not to fall for a PA with Abbas kept on as a figurehead if Israel is already justifying and exemplifying such a policy? Declarations aside, Israel is acting as if it wishes to save the PA from collapse even if Hamas is the force behind it. The specter, if it is one, of the PA's collapse should be Hamas's problem, not ours. It is Hamas, and not Israel, that should have to grapple with the changes

necessary to avert such a crisis."

### III. "Shalom, Orange Brothers"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit addressed the disengagement opponents in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 7): "You know that an overwhelming majority, among yourselves as well, will vote for parties that express some sort of willingness to withdraw in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. There is no essential-qualitative difference in the plans spanning from Binyamin Netanyahu to Dr. Yossi Beilin, and this includes, from the Right and Left, Avigdor Lieberman, Ehud Olmert, and Amir Peretz. Lieberman's land and population swap can even be supported by the signatories of the Geneva agreement. What is the difference between the Roadmap, with its hint of another unilateral withdrawal, as implied by Ehud Olmert at the Herzliya Conference, and Netanyahu's 'iron wall'? The only difference is over quantity. Over how much land and sand to concede.... What has changed? Why will you be able to support what you rejected until now? Because Hamas's rise to power provides Israel with a chance of obtaining American and European consent for Israel to determine a border line on a route that expands the separation fence without any foreseeable time limit.... What will you receive in exchange? A great deal. The bulk of the nation will be behind you; perhaps you will even have the left wing's support; some expansion of the settlement blocs; and yes, and this is the heart of the matter, the debate on dividing Jerusalem will become redundant.... Put aside your anger. It is a bad adviser. This is the propitious moment. It is liable to pass. Don't miss this opportunity. Let us restore the glory of the past. The parties from the Right and Left will follow."

### 12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

#### Summary:

Avner Cohen, author of "Israel and the Bomb" and "The Last Taboo," a senior researcher at the University of Maryland, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The need to deal with the Iranian nuclear capability strengthens the notion that the time has come for the state of Israel to find intelligent ways to clean up its nuclear status."

#### Block Quotes:

"Time to Come Clean on the Bomb"

Avner Cohen, author of "Israel and the Bomb" and "The Last Taboo," a senior researcher at the University of Maryland, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 7): "Every time the subject of the Iranian nuclear issue comes up in international forums ... there is someone who raises the issue of the exceptional Israeli nuclear issue.... Even in the United States there are those who argue that only if Israel is brought into the Iranian equation in some way is there a chance of preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. And indeed, the U.S. has made possible the introduction of a connection in this spirit, though softer and diluted, into the IAEA decision of this weekend, which also included a mention of the commitment to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The attempt to put Israel and Iran on the same level, or even to create a concrete political connection between them, is ignorant, unfair and biased.... [In any case,] the need to deal with the Iranian nuclear capability strengthens the notion that the time has come for the state of Israel to find intelligent ways to clean up its nuclear status, at home and abroad.... Perhaps a fresh prime minister, who is open to innovative thinking, will be able to deal with the complex challenge of formulating a more transparent and democratic Israeli nuclear policy appropriate to the 21st century."

### 13. Israel-India Relations:

#### Summary:

1P. R. Kumaraswamy, who teaches Israeli politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "For political, economic and security reasons, India needs to maintain close ties with Iran, as well as with Israel and the U.S. While the latter two are complementary, relations with Iran place India in a fix."

Block Quotes:  
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"Squaring a Triangle?"

1P. R. Kumaraswamy, who teaches Israeli politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 7): "By voting with the majority at the IAEA and endorsing the decision to refer the question of Iran's suspected nuclear program to the UN Security Council, India has opened a new chapter in its foreign policy.... [However,] for political, economic and religious as well as energy considerations, political parties in India have demanded and worked toward closer ties with Teheran.... The potential of Iran emerging as the principal source of India's energy demands and a long-term supplier of gas added a true strategic dimension.... Despite the vote, India is unlikely to abandon Iran. It has strong interest in maintaining and strengthening its ties with Teheran. Unlike China and Russia, its leverage vis-a-vis Tehran is relatively limited. For instance, there are indications that Iran is demanding a higher price for an already concluded gas deal. In short, for political, economic and security reasons, India needs to maintain close ties with Iran, as well as with Israel and the U.S. While the latter two are complementary, relations with Iran place India in a fix. That is why India's Iran policy is one of the most serious challenges facing foreign policy decision makers in New Delhi."

JONES